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**dummies**<sup>®</sup>  
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**Paul McFedries**

Lifelong fitness enthusiast





# Fitbit®

by Paul McFedries

for  
**dummies**®  
A Wiley Brand

## Fitbit® For Dummies®

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# Introduction

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**W**ait a minute, I hear you thinking, *does the world really need an entire book about Fitbit?* First, whoa, your thinking is loud. Second, yes the world really *does* need a book about Fitbit. Sure, most Fitbit trackers are simple bands that you secure to your favorite wrist and start walking (or running or skipping or whatever). However, that apparent simplicity is only on the surface. Scratch that surface and you uncover an entire world of activity tracking that's much deeper and more powerful than most folks know.

Yes, most Fitbit devices are easy to learn and use, but that up-front ease belies a complex background of features, settings, and customizations that can help you get the most out of your Fitbit. And more sophisticated devices such as the Charge 3 and the Ionic and Versa watches are brimming with buttons and options and apps that come with a learning curve.

Finally, it's one thing to operate your Fitbit, but it's quite another to use your Fitbit to reach a goal. Whether that goal is to get fit, lose weight, eat better, or reduce stress, your Fitbit has settings and features — many of them obscure and hard to find — that can help you get there.

## About This Book

---

So, yep, I wrote a book about Fitbit. Welcome, friend, to *Fitbit For Dummies*, which takes you on a complete tour of the Fitbit ecosystem, from the Fitbit trackers to the Fitbit app to the social features of Fitbit.com. In the end, you'll learn everything you need to know to get the most out of your Fitbit investment — and have a ton of fitness-related fun.

*Fitbit For Dummies* offers 14 chapters, but just because they appear sequentially, that doesn't mean you have to read them that way. Use the table of contents or index to find the information you need — and dip into and out of the book when you have a question about Fitbit specifically or health and fitness tracking generally.

If your time is limited (or you're just aching to get tonight's TV-watching started), you can also ignore anything marked by the Technical Stuff icon or the information in sidebars (the gray-shaded boxes). Yes, these tidbits are fascinating (if I do say so myself), but they aren't critical to the subject at hand, so you won't miss anything crucial by skipping them.

Within this book, you might see some web addresses breaking across two lines of text. If you're reading this book in print and want to visit one of these web pages, type the web address exactly as it's noted in the text, pretending that any line breaks don't exist. If you're reading this as an e-book, you've got it easy — just tap the web address to be taken directly to the web page.

## Foolish Assumptions

This book is for people who are new (or relatively new) to using a Fitbit activity tracker. Therefore, I do *not* assume that you're a Fitbit expert, a Fitbit guru, or a Fitbit whiz. However, I do assume the following:

- » You know how to plug in and connect devices.
- » You have a running Wi-Fi network with an Internet connection.
- » You know the password for your Wi-Fi network.
- » You have an iOS or an Android mobile device (that is, a smartphone or tablet) or a Windows 10 PC.
- » You know how to install and operate apps on your mobile device or PC.

## Icons Used in This Book

Like other books in the *Dummies* series, this book's margin has icons, or little pictures, to flag things that don't quite fit into the flow of the chapter discussion. Here are the icons that I use:



REMEMBER

This icon marks text that contains something useful or important enough that you'd do well to store the text somewhere safe in your memory for later recall.





TECHNICAL  
STUFF

This icon marks text that contains some for-nerds-only technical details or explanations. Feel free to skip this information.



TIP

This icon marks shortcuts or easier ways to do things, which I hope will make your life — or, at least, the Fitbit portion of your life — more efficient.



WARNING

This icon marks text that contains a friendly but unusually insistent reminder to avoid doing something. You have been warned.

## Beyond the Book

In addition to what you're reading right now, this product also comes with a free access-anywhere cheat sheet that includes important things you need to know to be healthy and fit, the most useful Fitbit account settings, and a glossary of important health and fitness tracking terms. To get this cheat sheet, go to [www.dummies.com/](http://www.dummies.com/) and type **Fitbit For Dummies Cheat Sheet** in the Search box.

## Where to Go from Here

If you've had your Fitbit for a while and you're familiar with the basics, you can probably get away with skipping the first three chapters and diving in to any part of the book that exudes usefulness or interestingness. The chapters present their Fitbit know-how in readily digestible, bite-size tidbits, so feel free to graze your way through the book.

If you and Fitbit haven't met yet — particularly if you're not sure what a Fitbit even *does* — this book has you covered. To get your relationship with Fitbit off to a fine start, I highly recommend reading the book's first three chapters to get some of the basics down cold. From there, you can branch out anywhere you like, safe in the knowledge that you have some survival skills to fall back on!



# 1

# Introducing Fitbit

## **IN THIS PART . . .**

Discover the benefits and learn the basics of health and fitness tracking.

Check out the available Fitbit devices and learn which one is right for you.

Find out how to configure your Fitbit and install and set up the Fitbit app.

- » Getting a grip on self-tracking
- » Exploring all the reasons why tracking your health is a good idea
- » Understanding a few health tracking pitfalls
- » Checking out self-tracking stats such as steps, distance, and heart rate

## Chapter **1**

# Understanding Health and Fitness Tracking

**Y**ou are a data-generating machine. When you pay with a credit card, drive through an automated toll system, answer an email, or make a call, you leave a steady stream of ones and zeroes in your wake. This so-called *digital exhaust* is the trackable or storable actions, choices, and preferences that you generate as you go about your life. Even when you're just browsing the web, you leave behind not fingerprints but *clickprints* that uniquely identify your surfing behavior and lengthen the paperless trail that documents your electronic self.

All the data you generate is invariably used to make others rich, usually by selling it to advertisers and marketers. Wouldn't it be nice if you could generate data that would help *you*? I'm not talking about data that will make you rich, at least not literally. I'm talking about data that you can use to make yourself healthier, fitter, slimmer, and calmer.

Welcome to the world of health and fitness tracking. In this chapter, I take you on a tour of this world, explore its benefits (and, yes, its few downsides), and introduce you to the types of data you can track. It's all presented from a Fitbit point of view.

# Introducing Self-Tracking

From time to time, you might harbor vague worries about oversharing on social networks or being tracked online by ad networks, but you probably don't think about the data shadow you cast wherever you go. However, a growing segment of the population spends a remarkable amount of time and effort trying to generate *more* personal data. While the rest of us are content to step out for a short walk after lunch, these people *count* every step they take. The likes of you and I might groggily estimate the number of hours we slept last night, but these people wear their Fitbits to bed to know exactly how many hours and minutes they slept and what portion of that sleep was spent in the REM (rapid eye movement) state.

I speak of *self-trackers*, people who use technology to acquire, store, and analyze their own life data. Their self-tracking can create detailed records of food, exercise, and location, as well as mood, alertness, overall well-being, and other seemingly non-quantifiable psychological states. This process of self-digitization is almost always enhanced by a Fitbit or similar wearable computing technology that enables the self-monitoring of physiological states and self-sensing of such external data as steps taken and floors climbed. These self-professed data junkies select from a variety of apps and websites that serve as tools for self-quantifying — and that prod them into doing even more of it. It's no wonder, then, that the movement as a whole is often called the *quantified self* and its practitioners are increasingly known as *quantified-selfers* or, simply, *QSers*.

You might think that the point of all this self-scrutiny is just to keep a record of vital stats, but self-trackers are not content with merely tracking a few numbers. Their interest lies in *quantitative assessment*: extracting knowledge from the raw data. They want to put their lives under the *macroscope*, which is the general term for any technology that enhances a person's ability to gather and analyze data. If that data tells you that you're just as bright-eyed and bushy-tailed on days when you managed only five or six hours of sleep, the lesson is clear: You're one of those lucky people who don't need seven or eight hours of sack time. If your heart rate spikes when you sit down to dinner, maybe a little family counseling is in order. In short, by analyzing detailed data over a long time, self-trackers turn themselves into self-experimenters, or perhaps even body hackers. The aim? Nothing more or less than the examined life, albeit one where *examined* means tracked, quantified, recorded, and analyzed.

## Why Track Your Health and Fitness?

Self-tracking is a bona fide trend, but is it a bandwagon *you* should jump on? Perhaps you've come to the conclusion that you could be more active, fitter, calmer, and just healthier overall. If so, that's great! But you might also be asking yourself

whether you really need to self-track your activities, exercises, food, and sleep. Why go to the trouble? Can't you just do what's necessary and leave it at that?

So many questions! Fortunately, the answers to all of them lead to the simple conclusion that, yes, self-tracking is worth the effort. Why? I've come up with no less than ten reasons:

- » Monitoring your progress
- » Figuring out what does and doesn't work for you
- » Keeping yourself motivated
- » Challenging yourself
- » Challenging others
- » Figuring out what health or fitness activities to try next
- » Performing experiments
- » Breaking bad habits
- » Encouraging good habits
- » Learning about yourself

In the next few sections, I fill in the details for each reason.

## Putting numbers to feelings: Monitoring your progress

Perhaps the most straightforward reason to track your health and fitness is to measure your progress. Sure, when you first start a new health or fitness regimen, at some point you start to feel better, and in many cases a *lot* better. But that initial massive — and, hence, noticeable — difference soon gives way to smaller — and, hence, not always noticeable — improvements. Before long, it might seem as though you're no longer progressing at all, which is the point at which many people either scale back their lifestyle changes or quit altogether.

The problem here is that determining whether you feel better isn't an exact process, especially when those feelings become subtle. Don't get me wrong: Feeling fitter or healthier is a fantastic reward for all that work you're doing. But for long-term success, you need to back up those subjective feelings with some objective data. To get that objectivity, you need to *measure* your progress by monitoring your activities, exercises, and body composition. That's where your Fitbit comes in, because it gives you a record of what you've done, which you can compare to what you're doing now.

How does that comparison help? Well, if you don't feel all that much better now than you did last month, but your Fitbit tells you that, say, you're averaging two thousand more steps per day or your heart rate is five beats lower, you know you're still heading in the right direction despite how you feel. Oh, and good job, by the way!

## Figuring out what does and doesn't work for you

The road to your best self isn't a straight line. Yes, the general direction is clear — move more, eat better, and reduce stress — but the specific route to get there is different for everyone. Ideally, you'll just happen to take the path that's right for you and not head down a bunch of dead-end streets. Ah, but there's the rub: How do you know when you're cruising down the right road and when you're wasting your time on a cul-de-sac? In short (and to finally move on from that now overdone “road” metaphor), how do you know what works for you and what doesn't?

That's where health and fitness tracking shines. After you've used your Fitbit for a while, you end up with a priceless trove of data that you can mine for insights into what has been effective for you in the past. For example, if your main goal is to lose weight, you can analyze your historical data to look for periods when your weight dropped steadily and when your weight stayed the same or even increased. Now you can compare what you were eating, what types of exercise you were doing, how much sleep you were getting, and so on for those different periods. Ideally, you'll start to see patterns in the data that tell you what works and what doesn't.

## Keeping yourself motivated

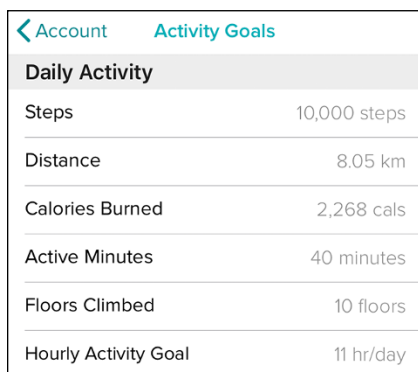
You might think that you don't need to track your health and fitness because all you need to do is set a goal and then work towards it day in and day out, without exception. Well, sure, that would be great if you could manage it, but study after study has shown a hard truth: Willpower doesn't work. By sheer force of will, you can't make yourself do the work necessary to get fit or lose weight or reach whatever you've established as your health or fitness grail.

Does that mean there's no point in even trying? Definitely not! The secret sauce of success here isn't willpower — it's *motivation*. If you're sufficiently motivated to reach your goal, willpower is unnecessary because you'll *want* to do the work you need to do to get where you want to go.

Motivation comes in many forms: an upcoming beach vacation, a future charity run, or a bet with a friend. You can also use your Fitbit to get motivated: If you look back at your historical data and see your daily steps steadily increasing or your weight steadily decreasing, the motivation to keep that trend going is right there.



Not only that, but you can configure your Fitbit with specific daily goals, such as 10,000 steps and 10 floors climbed (see Figure 1-1). Your Fitbit will show your progress towards those goals, motivating you to walk the long way home or take the stairs instead of the elevator to put yourself over the top.



The screenshot shows the 'Activity Goals' section of a Fitbit app. At the top, there are two tabs: 'Account' (with a back arrow) and 'Activity Goals'. Below the tabs is a header 'Daily Activity'. The main content is a list of activity metrics, each with a horizontal line below it. The metrics and their values are: Steps (10,000 steps), Distance (8.05 km), Calories Burned (2,268 cals), Active Minutes (40 minutes), Floors Climbed (10 floors), and Hourly Activity Goal (11 hr/day).

Daily Activity	
Steps	10,000 steps
Distance	8.05 km
Calories Burned	2,268 cals
Active Minutes	40 minutes
Floors Climbed	10 floors
Hourly Activity Goal	11 hr/day

**FIGURE 1-1:** Set daily goals for steps, calories burned, floors, and more.

## Challenging yourself

One of the main reasons why people fail to reach their health or fitness goals is that they start off well and see some good results, so they just continue what they're doing. That doesn't sound so bad, except that your body has a wonderful way of adapting to most things you throw at it. When you start walking or running or lifting weights, what feels excruciatingly hard at first starts to feel pretty good after you've done it a few times. The exercise is stressing your heart and slightly breaking down your muscles. Once you stop, your body doesn't just repair the damage; it rebuilds your heart and muscles so that they're stronger. That process, which is called *adaptation*, is one of the secrets of getting fit.

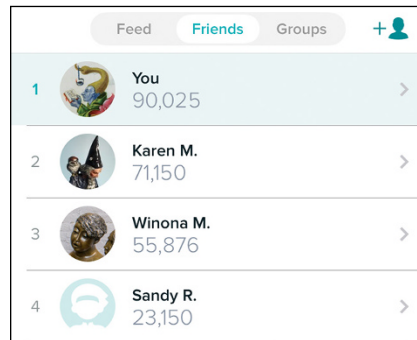
Or, I should say, it's one of the secrets of getting fit *if* you slowly and steadily increase the amount of stress you place on your body. If you just keep doing the same old thing, your body will simply adapt to that load and stop improving, which is why all successful health and fitness programs require you to challenge yourself. If you averaged 10 minutes per mile on your runs last week, see if you can run at 9 minutes and 45 seconds per mile this week; if you averaged 10,000 steps a day last month, shoot for 11,000 this month; if you walked 900 miles last year, set your sights on an even 1,000 this year.

How do you know what you did last week, last month, or even last year? Your Fitbit can keep track for you, so it's easy to look back on your historical data and challenge yourself to be a better version of yourself.

## Challenging others

Ideally, with the help of your Fitbit, your health and fitness motivation will come from within, but internal motivation isn't all you should look for. *External motivation* — that is, getting other people involved in firing yourself up to exercise or diet or whatever — can be an important part of your new regimen. For example, the simple act of *announcing* your health or fitness goal to friends or family members can do wonders for motivating you to stick to that goal.

How can your Fitbit help here? As I show in Chapter 4, your Fitbit account comes with a ton of social features. For example, after you've connected with some people, the Fitbit app displays a leaderboard that shows who among your friends has done the most steps in the past week, as shown in Figure 1-2. Similarly, Fitbit offers several challenges that you can invite people to participate in. One popular challenge is to see who can take the most steps over the coming weekend.



**FIGURE 1-2:** See who among your friends has taken the most steps.

## Figuring out what comes next

Health and fitness regimens are not — or shouldn't be — static routines. But even if your program includes steady increases and regular challenges (both internal and external), you'll still be faced one day with the "What do I do next?" question. I'm not talking about how many steps you should walk that day or what you should eat. No, this is Big Picture stuff: Adding entirely new types of exercise, cutting out parts of your routine, and so on.

These major changes shouldn't be undertaken willy-nilly. Fortunately, if you've accumulated a decent amount of historical health and fitness data, you can make an informed choice without the willy or the nilly.

For example, if you've been running and cycling, you can examine your previous workouts to see which sport has shown the most improvement. If you feel you've

worked equally hard in both but, say, your running performance has improved much faster than your cycling, you might decide to focus more on your running.

## Performing experiments

Despite what many so-called gurus will try to sell you, gaining and maintaining health and fitness is not complicated:

- » To lose weight, your calories out must exceed your calories in.
- » To eat well, your diet should consist of lots of fresh fruits and vegetables, not too much meat (especially red meat), and little processed food.
- » To get fit, find an activity or sport you like, start easy, and then slowly but steadily increase the duration and intensity.

If you've been sedentary for a long time or have health problems such as heart disease or diabetes, I strongly advise you to see your doctor before beginning any type of exercise program.

- » To sleep well, avoid screen time before bed, go to bed at a regular time, and get at least seven or eight hours of shut-eye.



WARNING

If you follow these basic guidelines diligently, health and fitness will follow as day follows night. That said, nothing is stopping you from thinking outside this basic health and fitness box. If you run or cycle, for example, you could try adding some workouts on an elliptical machine or a stair-climber to improve leg strength. Or you could add yoga or Pilates sessions to strengthen your core (the muscles around your trunk and pelvis).

However, you need to set up these trials like an experiment. Your Fitbit data will tell you where you are now, and you can then monitor your stats as you add an exercise or activity to see what effect it has.

## Breaking bad habits

You form habits by repeatedly making the same choices over time, to the point where you no longer even think about what you're doing. Sit at your desk doing work all day; sit on your couch watching TV all evening; repeat tomorrow and the next day and the day after that. Just like that, you've developed the bad habit of sitting most of the day, and you probably don't even realize it.

Ah, but that's where your Fitbit comes in to save the day. Above all else, a Fitbit is an *activity tracker*, tracking when you move during the day and when you don't.

For example, your Fitbit can track the total number of minutes you're active during the day and the hours during the day when you take at least 250 steps. If your total active minutes is very low and you don't take at least 250 steps most of the hours during the day, you have a bad inactivity habit. But now, thanks to your Fitbit, you *know* you have a bad habit, which is the first step in breaking the habit and getting more active.

## Encouraging good habits

Making bad choices over and over, day after day, leads to bad habits, but here's the good news: Making *good* choices over and over, day after day, leads to good habits. Health and fitness tracking can help you get on the good habit path by showing you which activities bring positive results. And seeing those positive results in hard numbers — increased steps, lower heart rate, or a weight closer to your goal — gives you the motivation to keep doing those activities. The result is a virtuous cycle that leads to the formation of good health-and-fitness-enhancing habits.



REMEMBER

Don't expect your good habits to form in a few days or even a few weeks. A 2009 study found that on average it takes people about 66 days to form a habit. So hang in there!

A top-notch tracker will also help you form good habits by giving you small nudges throughout the day. For example, when Fitbit shows you any daily stat, it includes an icon with a partial circle around it, and that circle is completed only when you reach your daily goal. For example, Figure 1-3 shows that today I've taken a bit less than 9,000 steps, and the not-quite-filled-in circle tells me that I'm shy of my goal of 10,000 steps. I want to complete that circle, so I'm motivated to keep moving.

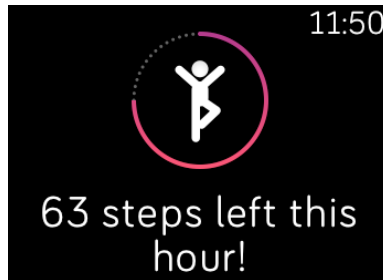
10,000 steps completes this circle



**FIGURE 1-3:**  
The circle associated with each Fitbit stat closes when you've reached your goal.

Similarly, most Fitbits will display a notification at ten minutes to the hour if you've yet to meet your hourly goal, which by default is 250 steps, as shown in Figure 1-4. That's just two or three minutes of walking, so why not get out of your seat and move?

**FIGURE 1-4:**  
Your Fitbit nudges you if you haven't taken at least 250 steps this hour.



## Learning about yourself

A typical health and fitness tracker generates a ton of data. Depending on the device's capabilities, it can track steps, heart rate, floors climbed, distance, pace, active minutes, and calories burned. That wide range of stats has one thing in common: Each piece of data tells you something about yourself. Without a tracker, the days turn into weeks, the weeks turn into months, and the months turn into years, and all the while you almost certainly have only a vague idea of how active you are, how much sleep you're getting, and how well you're eating. And, if you're like most people, even that vague idea is probably an overestimate. Improving your health and fitness means knowing yourself, and the best way to do that is to get some objective data about your activities, workouts, and body composition. That's right in the wheelhouse of any tracker worthy of the name, so if an examined life is your goal, make a health and fitness tracker your tool.

# Understanding the Downside of Health and Fitness Tracking

Downside? With all the positive reasons for tracking your health and fitness outlined in the preceding section, could being a self-tracker have any downsides? Yep. Several pitfalls exist, but they are minor and can be easily avoided if you understand them and are mindful of them as you track your activity. Here they are:

- » **Feelings of pressure or stress to meet your daily goals:** Meeting your daily goal for, say, steps taken or active minutes is a great feeling. However, in your

quest to get that feeling, you might end up putting a ton of pressure on yourself. First, remember that although meeting your goals is worthwhile, a relaxed attitude towards those goals is best. Plus, stress can undo many of your health and fitness gains, so there's some twisted irony to self-generating stress *about* those health and fitness gains.

- » **Feelings of guilt, shame, or unworthiness when you don't meet your daily goals:** Your daily activity goals are meant to be a gentle goad that gets you moving and making better choices in your life. These goals are not judgements, however. If you fall short of floors climbed or calories burned, shake it off and resolve to do better tomorrow. Remember that the road to good health and overall fitness is a long one (in fact, it is — or it should be — a life-long one) and doesn't depend on the results of a single day. If you meet your goals most of the time (think of them as “daily-ish” goals), you'll eventually get where you want to go.
- » **Having your daily routines disrupted or controlled by your desire to meet your activity goals:** If by “daily routines” you're talking about prolonged sitting at work or in the evening, being active instead is an upside. However, if an old friend invites you out for a coffee or a meal and you beg off because you need to get in a few thousand more steps to meet your goal, that decision is probably not balanced. Go ahead and meet your friend; you can always reach your goal tomorrow. Better yet, ask your friend to go on a walk with you!
- » **Feeling that an un-tracked activity is a wasted activity:** You go out for a long walk, realize you've forgotten your Fitbit, and no longer enjoy the walk because now the steps and activity time don't “count.” Okay, I get it: In an ideal world, you'd never miss a step or a minute or a mile. But in the real world, many activities are untracked. That's fine because it's *way* more important that you are active, even if that activity is now “tracked” only in your head.
- » **Lacking motivation to be active if you don't have your tracker:** This pitfall is related to the preceding one in that an activity undertaken without a tracker isn't real or important because the activity won't generate stats. Without those numbers, you lack the motivation to even do the activity. Remember that your health, not a bunch of stats, is what is real and important. Do the activity anyway because it will get you closer to your long-term goal. Your future healthy and fit self will thank you.



REMEMBER

If you take a walk or perform some other activity without your Fitbit strapped on, your effort doesn't have to go unrecorded. You can always log the activity manually, as described in Chapter 5.

# Learning about Health and Fitness Tracking Metrics

A *metric* is a standard that you use to measure something. That standard is usually *quantifiable*, which means that it can be expressed numerically or statistically. Health and fitness tracking — which earlier in this chapter I said was also known as the *quantified-self* movement — is all about metrics and the numbers they generate: steps taken, floors climbed, hours slept, and many more.

Fortunately, these metrics are mostly straightforward, but even apparently simple metrics — such as the number of steps you take in a day — have subtle nuances that you need to understand. I spend the rest of this chapter going through the seven metrics — steps taken, distance covered, floors climbed, active minutes, heart rate, calories burned, and sleep time — tracked by most Fitbits.



REMEMBER

Note I said *most* Fitbits. The simpler Fitbit trackers, such as the Ace for kids and the Zip, only track steps taken, active time, and calories burned. See Chapter 2, to learn more about what metrics each Fitbit device can track.

## Steps taken

Fitbit made its name as a simple and easy-to-use step tracker, also known as a *pedometer*. To this day, the number of steps taken daily (see Figure 1-5) remains the device's most iconic and familiar metric. That steps get pride-of-place on your Fitbit isn't surprising because the humble step is an indication of activity. Taking a step means you're not sitting down or standing in one spot, both of which, if done to excess, are bad for your health. You can't get or stay fit without movement, so a step is, well, a step in the right direction.

"Wait a minute," I hear you ask. "If the Fitbit goes on my wrist, how does it know what my feet and legs are doing? Excellent question! The answer is that each Fitbit comes with an *accelerometer*, which is a special sensor designed to detect movement (especially acceleration) and convert that movement into data. A Fitbit can detect steps from your wrist because it assumes that you swing your arms while you move. If a given arm swing's overall motion, speed, acceleration, frequency, and distance surpass a predefined threshold, Fitbit's step-counting algorithm identifies your movement as a step and adds that step to your total.



**FIGURE 1-5:** Your Fitbit tracks the number of steps you take each day.

This algorithm works fairly well, particularly because the accelerometer can detect movement along three axes: forward-back, left-right, and up-down. However, you can fool the algorithm in several ways:

- »» If your Fitbit-wearing arm is still or moves only a little as you walk (or run), your steps might not get counted. Fortunately, this tendency to miss steps when your arm is still usually doesn't apply when you're pushing a stroller or a shopping cart.
- »» In an activity that includes vigorous arm motions without steps — such as shoveling snow and digging holes — those arm motions get counted as steps. I don't view these extra steps as unearned because, let's face it, shoveling and digging are *hard*.
- »» If you vigorously swing your arm in a walking or running motion while sitting down or standing in place, those arm swings are counted as steps.

So, yes, it's possible to cheat your step count by swinging your Fitbit-shod arm while not moving. Of course, you would *never* do that because you know as well as I do that you're only cheating yourself, right? *Right?*



## Distance covered

Suppose you walk 10,000 steps today and then walk another 10,000 steps six months from now. Suppose, too, that you were exercising regularly during those six months. Does the fact that you did the same number of steps mean that your fitness didn't improve over that time? Not necessarily. If the second time around you covered a greater distance, you got more out of those steps by walking at a faster pace.

Being able to compare how far a given number of steps takes you is, in a nutshell, why the metric of distance covered is important. If you can walk (or run) farther given the same number of steps — or the same elapsed time — your fitness is improving.

Also, distance on its own (that is, without reference to the number of steps involved) is important for runners and cyclists. If you're training for your first 10K race, you need to set up your program to build your distance slowly until you know you can complete the 10K distance.

It might seem weird that a wrist-based device can figure out how far you've traveled during a walk or run (see Figure 1-6). But a Fitbit can calculate distance in not one but three ways:

- » A Fitbit Ionic watch has an on-board Global Positioning System (GPS) receiver, so it can use that GPS signal to follow your location and calculate your distance automatically.

Both the Ionic and the Versa use GPS only for distance-related activities (such as runs and walks) initiated by the Exercise app (see Chapter 9). The Ionic and the Versa don't use GPS for regularly tracked activities.

- » A Fitbit Versa watch or a Charge 3 or Inspire wristband can connect to your smartphone's GPS receiver and calculate your distance by using that signal.
- » All other Fitbit devices that track distance do so by multiplying the number of steps you take by the length of your stride. Wait, *what!* How can a Fitbit know your stride length? Fitbit calculates stride length automatically by using the height and gender info you supply when you first set up your Fitbit account (see Chapter 3). Actually, Fitbit makes two calculations: your walking stride length and your running stride length.



REMEMBER



REMEMBER

If you have your doubts that a stride length calculation based on height and gender can be accurate, not to worry: You can figure out your actual stride lengths and enter them manually, as I explain in Chapter 5.